

REMARKS BY COMMISSIONER STEWART N. SMITH  
CONCERNING THE AUBURN AGRICULTURAL PROTECTION ZONE ORDINANCE  
BEFORE THE MEMBERS OF THE AUBURN CITY COUNCIL  
OCTOBER 3, 1983

MEMBERS OF THE AUBURN CITY COUNCIL, MY NAME IS STEWART N. SMITH AND I AM THE MAINE COMMISSIONER OF AGRICULTURE. I APPRECIATE THE OPPORTUNITY TO SPEAK TO YOU TONIGHT AS YOU DISCUSS AUBURN'S AGRICULTURAL PROTECTION ORDINANCE.

I RECOGNIZE THAT THE ORDINANCE ITSELF IS A LOCAL ISSUE. ON THE OTHER HAND, AS COMMISSIONER OF AGRICULTURE, I OBVIOUSLY HAVE A DEEP CONCERN FOR MAINTAINING MAINE'S AGRICULTURAL LAND BASE. THIS IS A STATEWIDE ISSUE AND WHAT AUBURN HAS DONE WITH AGRICULTURAL ZONING IS OF STATEWIDE INTEREST.

UNLIKE SOME STATES, MAINE CURRENTLY LACKS A STATE LEVEL AG-LAND PROTECTION PROGRAM. AS A RESULT, PRESERVATION OF FARMLAND HAS ESSENTIALLY BEEN LEFT UP TO MUNICIPALITIES. I BELIEVE THAT THE AUBURN AGRICULTURAL ZONE ORDINANCE IS ONE OF THE MOST EFFECTIVE, FORWARD-LOOKING FARMLAND PROTECTION PROGRAMS IN MAINE AND A UNIQUE MODEL FOR OTHER TOWNS.

AS A STATE WE HAVE LOST A TREMENDOUS AMOUNT OF LAND FROM OUR AGRICULTURAL BASE BETWEEN THE YEARS OF 1880 AND 1970. SINCE THE SECOND WORLD WAR ALONE WE HAVE LOST 3 MILLION ACRES, WHICH REPRESENTS TWO-THIRDS OF OUR BASE AT THAT TIME. THE RATE OF DECLINE HAS DECREASED SUBSTANTIALLY IN THE PAST FEW YEARS. HOWEVER, MAINE IS STILL LOSING FARMLAND DUE TO URBAN DEVELOPMENT, ABANDONMENT AND EROSION AND THESE LOSSES ARE OF GREAT CONCERN TO

THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE.

MAINE'S EXISTING PRODUCTIVE FARMLAND AMOUNTS TO LESS THAN 8 PERCENT OF THE STATE'S TOTAL ACREAGE. IT IS A SCARCE RESOURCE THAT IS ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL TO OUR CURRENT AND FUTURE AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION, AND THE LOSS OF FARMLAND IS A STATEWIDE PROBLEM THAT AFFECTS ALL MAINE CITIZENS.

DIRECTLY AND INDIRECTLY, AGRICULTURE GENERATES MORE THAN \$2 BILLION WORTH OF ECONOMIC ACTIVITY AND THOUSANDS OF JOBS FOR MAINE. LOCAL PRODUCTION OF FOOD MAKES A SIGNIFICANT AND VITAL CONTRIBUTION TO THE NUTRITIONAL NEEDS OF MAINE CONSUMERS. AND, IN ADDITION, FARMING AND FARMLAND IS A TRADITIONAL PART OF THE WAY OF LIFE AND RURAL CHARACTER THAT MAKES MAINE A SPECIAL PLACE.

IT IS IMPORTANT TO MAINTAIN MAINE'S AGRICULTURAL BASE, NOT ONLY FOR TODAY BUT ALSO FOR OUR FUTURE GENERATIONS. UNQUESTIONABLY, RESIDENTS OF MAINE AND NEW ENGLAND WILL IN THE FUTURE HAVE TO TURN TO MORE LOCAL SUPPLIES OF FOOD. WATER TABLES IN THE WEST ARE RECEDING SIGNIFICANTLY, AND THOSE STATES WILL BE PROVIDING A SMALLER PROPORTION OF OUR FOOD SUPPLY OVER TIME. IN ADDITION, THE INCREASING COSTS OF ENERGY HAVE INCREASED TRANSPORTATION COSTS, MAKING FOOD IMPORTED FROM A GREAT DISTANCE MORE EXPENSIVE THAN IT HAS BEEN IN THE PAST.

MAINTAINING OUR LAND BASE WILL BE ESSENTIAL IF WE ARE TO MAINTAIN THE POTENTIAL FOR AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION IN THE STATE OF MAINE. THERE ARE NO EASY ANSWERS TO THAT CHALLENGE. WHEN PEOPLE ASK ME HOW WE CAN GO ABOUT MAINTAINING OUR AGRICULTURAL LAND BASE I OFTEN REFER TO THE ZONING PROGRAM THAT YOU HAVE ADOPTED HERE. I USE THAT AS A MODEL FOR WHAT OTHER

MUNICIPALITIES CAN DO TO HELP GUARANTEE FUTURE FOOD PRODUCTION, AND I AM NOT ALONE IN USING AUBURN AS A MODEL. TWO YEARS AGO AT A FARMLAND CONFERENCE IN ROCKPORT, WHEN PARTICULAR PROGRAMS WERE DISCUSSED AND SUGGESTED TO STOP THE EROSION OF OUR FARMLAND BASE, SEVERAL PARTICIPANTS ALSO REFERRED TO THE AUBURN ZONING PROGRAM AS A GOOD MODEL TO FOLLOW. CLEARLY YOU HAVE SHOWN THE WAY ON THIS ISSUE.

I AM TOLD THAT ONE OF THE ARGUMENTS SUPPORTING A RELAXATION OR ABANDONMENT OF AUBURN'S AGRICULTURAL PROTECTION ZONE ORDINANCE IS BASED ON THE OPINION THAT FARMING IN THE ZONE IS RAPIDLY BEGINNING TO SLIDE OR DECLINE.

INFORMATION GATHERED BY MY STAFF OVER THE PAST WEEK, SUGGESTS THAT, IN FACT, THE MAJORITY OF AUBURN'S LARGEST ACTIVE FARMS ARE LOCATED IN THE CURRENT AGRICULTURAL ZONE. WE ARE ALSO TOLD THAT ALTHOUGH THE NUMBER OF INDIVIDUAL FARMING OPERATIONS HAS DECLINED, THE AMOUNT OF AGRICULTURAL LAND KEPT IN PRODUCTION HAS REMAINED ABOUT THE SAME. NEIGHBORING FARMERS HAVE, IN OTHER WORDS, TAKEN OVER THE MANAGEMENT OF FARMLAND FORMERLY OWNED BY PRODUCERS WHO HAVE GONE OUT OF BUSINESS. THOSE CURRENT FARMING OPERATIONS SEEM TO INCLUDE A VIABLE AND DIVERSIFIED MIX OF DAIRY FARMS, ORCHARDS, AND VEGETABLE FARMS.

LOOKING BEYOND YOUR LOCAL SITUATION, I THINK THERE IS A GENERAL MISCONCEPTION THAT AGRICULTURE IN MAINE AS A WHOLE IS DECLINING. IN FACT, OVER THE PAST FIVE YEARS, WE HAVE SEEN INDICATIONS OF A REVITALIZATION OF FARMING IN MAINE. STATEWIDE, THE NUMBER OF FARMS HAS ACTUALLY INCREASED. EACH YEAR SINCE 1978, THE CASH RECEIPTS OF MANY OF OUR MAJOR AGRICULTURAL COMMODITY GROUPS HAS ALSO INCREASED.

DESPITE INDICATIONS OF A REVITALIZED AGRICULTURE IN MAINE, AND NATIONAL TRENDS THAT FAVOR THIS REVITALIZATION, WE ARE STILL

LOSING VIABLE FARMLAND IN MANY AREAS OF THE STATE. I BELIEVE WE WILL BE MAKING A GRAVE MISTAKE IF WE CONTINUE TO ALLOW THIS TO HAPPEN. ONCE FARMLAND HAS BEEN CONVERTED TO OTHER USES IT IS VIRTUALLY IMPOSSIBLE TO PUT THAT LAND BACK INTO PRODUCTION. AS WE HAVE ALREADY SEEN IN SOME URBAN AREAS OF THE STATE, WHENEVER WE WAIT UNTIL FARMLAND LOSSES ARE AT A CRITICAL LEVEL IT ALREADY HAS BECOME TOO LATE.

IN CONTRAST TO SOME AREAS, AUBURN STILL HAS SUBSTANTIAL AGRICULTURAL LAND AND A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF EXISTING FARMING OPERATIONS. MOST OF THAT LAND AND ALMOST OF THE OPERATING FARMS ARE WITHIN THE CURRENT PROTECTION ZONE.

IF YOUR AGRICULTURAL ZONE ORDINANCE IS REPEALED OR CHANGED TO ALLOW RURAL RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT, IT WOULD INCREASE THE POSSIBILITY THAT PRODUCTIVE FARMLAND WILL BE LOST AND CREATE MAJOR ECONOMIC ROADBLOCKS TO ANY EXPANSION OR REVITALIZATION OF AGRICULTURE THAT MIGHT OTHERWISE OCCUR IN THE AREA IN THE FUTURE. WHERE RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT IS ALLOWED TO TAKE PLACE ON OR ADJACENT TO FARMLAND, COMPETITION FOR GOOD FARMLAND INCREASES SUBSTANTIALLY. THIS, IN TURN, PUTS GREATER ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL PRESSURES ON EXISTING FARMS. IT ALSO MAKE IT MUCH MORE EXPENSIVE -- SOMETIMES PROHIBITIVELY EXPENSIVE -- FOR NEW FARMING OPERATIONS TO LOCATE THERE AND KEEP OR BRING AVAILABLE FARMLAND BACK INTO PRODUCTION. IN THE MEANTIME, ANY FARMLAND THAT IS

SUBDIVIDED AND DEVELOPED WILL BE LOST PERMANENTLY FOR AGRICULTURAL USES.

BECAUSE OF THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE'S CONCERN FOR MAINTAINING AGRICULTURAL LAND, I STRONGLY SUPPORT MAINTAINING THE INTEGRITY OF AN AGRICULTURAL PROTECTION ZONE ORDINANCE. THROUGHOUT MAINE, THERE IS ROOM FOR DEVELOPMENT IN AREAS THAT ARE NOT DIRECTLY ADJACENT TO OR ON PRODUCTIVE AGRICULTURAL LAND. SUITABLE ALTERNATIVE LOCATIONS TO AGRICULTURAL AREAS CAN USUALLY BE FOUND FOR NON-AGRICULTURAL USES AND NEW DEVELOPMENT. I BELIEVE WE CAN CONTINUE TO PROTECT OUR FARMLAND AND, AT THE SAME TIME, CONTINUE TO EXPERIENCE HEALTHY RESIDENTIAL AND INDUSTRIAL GROWTH.

MAINE NEEDS LOCAL AND STATE POLICIES THAT PROTECT EXISTING FARMLAND AND ASSURES THAT ADEQUATE FARMLAND IS AVAILABLE TO US IN THE FUTURE. AUBURN'S AGRICULTURAL ZONE ORDINANCE IS AN EXCELLENT EXAMPLE OF WHAT CAN BE DONE AT THE LOCAL LEVEL.

THE DECISION YOU MAKE ON THE AGRICULTURAL ZONE ORDINANCE WILL SET AN IMPORTANT PRECEDENT OF STATEWIDE SIGNIFICANCE. COMPARED TO OTHER MAINE TOWNS, AUBURN SET AN EXAMPLE THAT WAS FAR AHEAD OF ITS TIME WHEN IT CREATED ITS AGRICULTURAL PROTECTION ZONE ORDINANCE IN 1960. FARMLAND PROTECTION IS EQUALLY IF NOT MORE CRUCIAL TODAY THAN IT WAS THEN. I HOPE THAT WE WILL SOON SEE OTHER TOWNS TAKE STEPS TO MATCH YOUR PROGRESS.

THANK YOU, I WOULD BE HAPPY TO TRY TO ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS...